6: Tomasic E-4 (1947-1948) 1953 RF1 Great Russia RF1
[XI century]

and hence, no group support could be found if a leader had attempted to form a centralized political authority or an imperial system over the whole area. The old Russian Chronicle of Kiev (12th century) describing a tribe with such a culture (the Polians) states that among them each kindred group (*rod*) lived in its own separate locality and had its own government.[4]

In a like manner, principles of dignity and moderation, as well as personal autonomy and lack of coerciveness, prevailed in family relations of these people. The Chronicle, for instance, states:

> The Polians had customs of their fathers, customs mild and peaceful (*krotok i tikh*); they showed a kind of reserve (*stydenie*) towards their daughters-in-law (*snokha*) and their sisters, towards their mothers and their parents, towards their fathers-in-law and their brothers-in-law; to all of the persons named they showed great reserve. They had marriage cusoms: the bridegroom did not go to seek his bride; she was taken to him in the evening, and the following morning they brought what belonged to her (*chto vdaduche*).[5]

It appears that the family organization of the Polians rested on mutual respect of all family members; that the bride brought the dowry which remained her personal property; that she might have had the initiative in wooing. This contention is supported by other evidence. Cosmas Pragensis, for instance, speaking of the old Bohemian Slavs, states: "It is not the men who choose the maids, but the maids themselves who take the husbands they like, and when they like."[6] A French writer who visited Ukraine in the seventeenth century wrote: "In Ukraine, contrary to the customs of all other nations, the husbands do not choose their wives, but are themselves chosen by their future consorts."[7]

There is also other evidence concerning some matriarchal traits of the early Slavs.[8] Throughout ages, women of the plains betwen the Dnieper and the Volga maintained property rights over their dowries and also over income from vegetables, poultry, dairy products and yarn that they produced and sold, though such rights were not recognized to men.[9] Although a woman in Russia did not have any claim to the property of her father or her brother, and only a limited right to that of her husband, she had the privilege, denied to a man, of saving and building up a

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class the tendency was toward the concentration of power in the hands of the more mighty princes.[13]

This concentration of power in the hands of the city plutocracy found its expression in the principle of an unanimity vote in the city assembly (*Veche*). Data on the early political and social organization of the Russian urban communities show that the unanimity in decisions was the rule. The old documents about these gatherings tell us that "what has been established by the oldest city, is maintained by its boroughs," that "all thought and spoke as one man," that "all were unanimous in the desire," and that the decision was reached "by all the oldest and all the youngest men of the assembly."[14]

But we also learn that this unopposed group consensus was achieved by means of threat and terror against all those who might show an inclination to disagree or who disagreed after the assembly had been held and after a resolution had been passed. The dissenters were often beaten with rods, despoiled of their property, or murdered. Sometimes they might escape such fate if ready to pay a fine that varied according to the rank of the dissenter. In this manner a minority, backed by physical force was able to enforce its will on the rest under the guise of "unanimity."[15]

Pressure for the unanimous consent on the part of the people was applied also in the village assemblies, and later in the land commune (*mir*). In some other customs of the Great-Russian peasantry, even in our own times, the unanimous consent was considered necessary. In marriage ceremonies, for instance, custom demanded that the bride when leaving her parental home obtain blessing from all her neighbors. There was, however, a threat against neighbors who refused their blessing. Curses were invoked against them: "Those who do not bless her, may they never marry their sons and daughters" (*Kto ne blagoslovit tomu vek sinov ne zhenit a docheri za muzh ne vdavat*).[16]

The principle of unanimity was apparently the procedure in the local assemblies of the Old-Slavonic soil cultivators of the Dnieper river basin. Such an unanimity was also practiced until our times in the Zadruga society of Croatia.[17] But in those pacific and anarchic societies the principle of unanimity was real, not

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that he might be rich and powerful in life.[6] For the same reason money was placed in the water when the child was bathed for the first time.[7]

In marriage customs the urge for power was expressed in certain activities performed during the marriage ritual and believed to contain magical properties that enabled either one or the other spouse to dominate. Also in the wedding party the bridegroom was called "knyaz" (prince) and his party "boyars"; an important part of the marriage ceremonies consisted in *velichat gostei*, that is in mutual glorification of the wedding guests.

The phrase *Kak vas velichat?*—how to glorify you?, which is employed when asking another person his name might indicate the same feelings. In early Russia personal names were formed by a combination of words which conveyed the image of rule, glory, power, holiness and destruction, such as Sviatoslav (the holy and glorious), Yaropolk (blazing power), Mstislav (the glory of revenge).

Another manifestation of power-seeking, mistrust and destructive aggression on the folk level is revealed, for instance, in attitudes toward women. The folk image of the woman is in remarkable contrast to the image of the mother. The derisive name for woman is *baba*, and baba is said "not to be a human being" (*Baba ne chelovek*), according to a proverb. Therefore mistreatment and abuse of women may be justified.[8] In the folk parlance distinction is made between *Krestyane* (Christians, peasants) and *zhenshchiny* (women). In the folk maxims women are pictured as immoral ("Three babas Sodom"), shameless ("A baba laughs where grandpa blushes"), more cunning than the devil ("Where the devil fails he sends a baba"), the cause of all man's troubles ("She was the cause of Adam's banishment"), and source of all evil ("We cannot expect any good from our rib").[9]

This folk concept of woman as an inferior being is found on all levels of Russian society. Comparatively few women have been admitted to the rank of saints in the Russian Church. Count Leo Tolstoy, a philosopher and novelist, who has been otherwise renowned for his ideas of Christian love, all-human brotherhood and an anarchic social and political equality, showed a great deal of misogynism. In his diary he pictures

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A Russian Peasant Wedding.

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AMONG the Russian peasants, particularly in more remote districts, the social ceremonies of a wedding are complicated and of long duration, and vastly more important in popular opinion than the church rite; for this reason we shall describe only the former. Of course, the blessing of the church is necessary to make the marriage binding, but it is comparatively an innovation, having been introduced only about one thousand years ago, while the relations represented by the social forms of the wedding date back very much farther. In them are plainly seen the former structure of the *clan* or *gens;* the opposing interests of the families of the bride and the groom; the existence, in prehistoric times of marriage by purchase and by capture amongst primitive people; the subjection of the girl to the father, in the patriarchal family, and to her father-in-law in the new home.

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It may be necessary to explain that in Russia the unit of social and economic life is the family, and that the father or eldest brother is the head of it; the young man, on marrying, does not set up for himself, but brings the bride to his father's house, where she becomes one of the daughters and takes her part in the work of the family. Only after the old man's death does separation take place; the married men divide the property and found households for themselves.

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In the family the woman is completely dominated by man, a fact that is indicated by many features in the ceremony. While

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single, the girl is allowed some freedom; she has more time at her disposal, she can go about with her friends, attend parties, etc. When married, the cares of her new position, the necessity of harder work for her new family and her altered position amongst people who are strangers to her and who look upon her as an intruder—all these reasons keep her in the house, and her time for social recreation is past. Therefore girlhood is considered the golden time in the life of a young woman, and a girl looks with dread and apprehension upon her approaching marriage; but on the other hand, love prompts her to join her husband and she hopes that his love will compensate her for what she will have to endure. In this way there is a mixture of grief and joy in the whole ceremony.

The weddings are nearly all held in the late fall or winter, when the field work is over for the year, the harvest sold and the family knows how much money it can afford to spend. When the old people have decided that their child shall marry, they ask him or her whom he or she likes best and whom next best. Marriage, it must be remembered, is often a business matter; there must be a wedding and at the chosen period. In fact, a marriage at any other time of the year is an exception. In this way it comes about that all the marriageable girls in the village are expecting their offers to come during the same week in the fall or winter, and are ready for them.

The room is cleaned and lighted up every night, the old people and the girl stay at home, while the smaller children run about the village, looking into the windows to find out how things are going on in their neighbors' houses.

The preliminaries are usually arranged between the two families, the marriage being really more the affair of these, than of the two young people themselves, since it is in fact the giving up of a working-hand by one family and her adoption into another one. The arrangements are made by friends or go-betweens. It is customary that a female relation of the groom goes to ask for the hand of the girl, and is then called a *svakha*. With her goes some old male relation or friend, who knows all the necessary forms of ceremony and is a persuasive talker; he is

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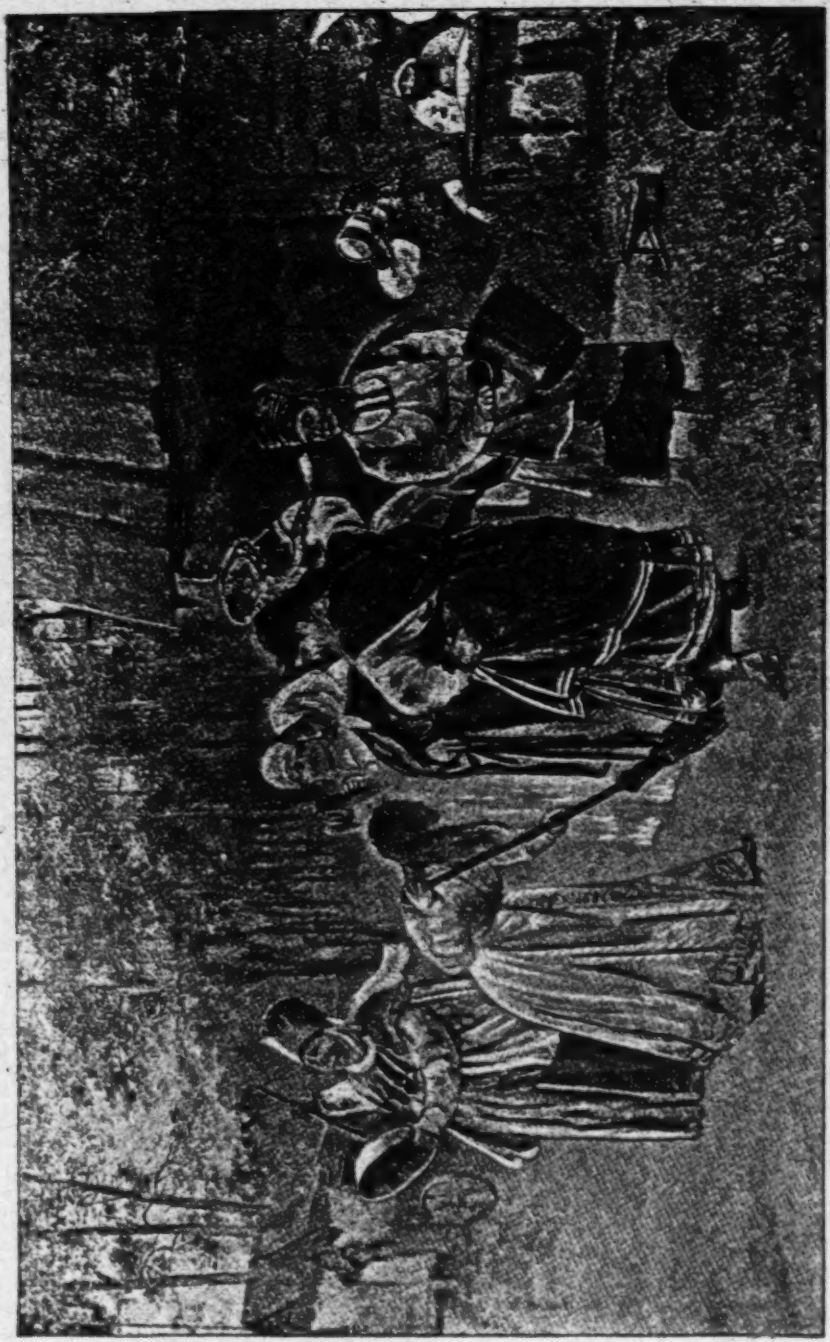

PROCEEDINGS USUALLY FOLLOWED AFTER THE BRIDE HAS TAKEN THE BATH.

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marriage by hiding herself and wailing for the loss of her maiden freedom and for her transfer to a strange family, and if she wishes to particularly honor the guest, she will do this, not only at the first visit, but also at every one that follows. The groom does not gain any new rights by the betrothal, and does not come to the house to see his bride; the most he can do is to come to the window, bringing cakes and candy, and talk to her from the outside, in the evenings. About two nights before the wedding, the maidens have a party, at which they try on the bridal dresses, help to finish the outfit, etc., singing at the same time doleful songs; deploring her hard fate of having to leave home and go among strangers to live. On the eve of the wedding there is another party, to which the young men are admitted. The maidens take leave of their playmate, who is going to bear the cares, hard work and responsibilities of a married woman; the men agree upon the order in which they will go in the wedding procession, and arrange about the outfit of sleighs, horses, bells, ornaments, etc. Meantime, of course, refreshments are served and songs sung. 584

In the marriage ceremonies themselves, are to be seen remains of many ancient social customs, and we may call attention to the changes in the life of a girl which they represent:

1. The meeting bears at first the character of the usual girls' social gatherings—*possidelky*, in this way depicting her previous easy life at home, free from care.

2. Enter the *svats*, who with ceremonies, sit down on the bench under the principal beam of the ceiling. They conduct the negotiations. The bride treats them to a glass of brandy, and gives expression to her consent by tying a towel around the arm of the *svat*.

3. The bride is preparing for the wedding. The *svat* and the other male guests are driven out of the room, with noise and jokes. The hair of the bride is combed and made up for the last time, into the single, free-hanging braid of a girl. This action can be seen in the picture of Makovsky, "The Dressing of the Bride," in the Russian section of the Art Palace, at the Columbian Exposition; only the scene and time refer to a wedding amongst Boyars, about 200 years ago. 585 [302]

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Another picture refering to the wedding ceremonial is the one of Korsukhin, to be seen at the same place, and a copy of which we reproduce on page 16 of this book. It represents the return of the bride from the bath on the eve of the marriage, with her companions and the *svakha*, with songs and dances, while one maiden sweeps the path before the bride. This is a bit of superstition, and illustrates the fear that the bride might be bewitched by something thrown in her way.

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4. The blessing of the bride by her parents. As the parents of the young couple do not go to church, the wedding procession is evidently the relic of the ancient form of marriage by capture, which was customary with the Russians in prehistoric times.

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5. The arrival of the groom with his kinsmen, representing the ancient clan, who used to help him capture the bride. The whole party goes in procession to the church, for the celebration of the sacred rite,—with shouting, bell-ringing, etc.

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from such a young man (naming him) have come to ask for her. If she likes him, she ought to answer the *svats* and treat them to something. The girl throws a towel over her shoulder, puts a glass of brandy upon a plate and brings it to the *svat*, he accepts it with thanks, but before drinking asks her what answer he shall take to young so and so. The girl blushes, but takes off the towel, and ties it around his left arm—which means her consent: the *svat* thanks her and drains his glass, while she sits down at the table and cries. The *svat* then rises, thanks the people of the house for the entertainment, and starts to leave. At this juncture, the other girls, the friends of the bride, surround him, mock and jeer him, pull him about, splash water on him, etc., at the same time singing a mocking song, "Matchmaker, you foolish matchmaker"—*svatoushka* (No. 23)[1]; this is to express their displeasure for depriving them of a companion. Finally the *svat* pacifies them by some small presents and is allowed to withdraw; the *svakha* (female matchmaker) remains behind and sends out all the men. The girls at the same time surround the bride, cover her head with a kerchief (in sign of her future dependence), commiserate her, and cry over her.

SCENE 4TH. *The Braiding of the Hair* (shown in the picture by Makovsky, "The Toilet of the Bride," in the Russian Section of the Art Palace). The *svakha* takes the bride by the hand and leads her to a chair in the middle of the room; she undoes the single braid, as worn by peasant girls, and combs it out, all the girl friends also come up one after the other and help to comb it, it is then put up again, for the *last time in her life*, into the single plait. The girls, meantime, depict in song the sorrow of separation from her family, the uncertain treatment awaiting her, etc. "A little duck"—*Outoushka* (No. 23)[2]. When the bride is dressed and her hair arranged, she is led to the table where she sits down with her younger brother by her side.

SCENE 5TH. A loud noise and stomping are heard approaching, and then a loud knocking at the door. On bidding them to come in, enter the groom, *droushka* (best man), and his friends. The bridegroom takes his place at the table by the bride, the others

[1] [See cat. 11b, p. 44 — Analyst]

[2] [See cat. 11b, p. 46; it should be no. 27 — Analyst]

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585 stand; the young men and women sing a song of glorification and praise. After its conclusion the groom thanks the company and rises; when he wants to lead the bride away, her brother resists him and has to be pacified with presents. This action hints at the old custom of purchasing the bride from her family or clan.

[788] SCENE 6TH. *The blessing of the bride.* The parents of the bride take a plate with bread and salt, and a holy image and advance into the middle of the room, where they stand facing the door. The groom leads the bride out to them, the young couple bow three times to each, kiss the image and then the old people, and receive their blessing. The bride embraces her mother and clings to her, crying. The *svakha* separates them and leads her out, preceded by the *droushka* and bridegroom. At the door the party is met by the girl's brother with a stick, and a girl friend with a spinning comb (*prialka*), who refuse to let them pass with threats and offers of violence. The *droushka* is obliged to buy them off again with a present, and then the young people go out to the waiting friends, who form into a procession and go to the church, with noise and merrymaking. The companions of the girl also leave the room; the parents of the bride remain behind after the leave-taking, and sit down at the table with bowed heads and crying.

ACT SECOND.—THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

SCENE 1ST. At the house of the groom. The parents of the groom busy themselves in preparing the room for the reception of the young couple, on their return from the church. Outside is heard the noise of an approaching party. The father of the groom takes a holy image, the mother some bread and salt on a plate (a sign of welcome), and both advance to the door to meet the procession.

SCENE 2D. The friends come in first, salute the old people and place themselves around the room; there are a few moments of expectation.

SCENE 3D. Finally the *droushka* (best man) appears, walking slowly and solemnly, leading the young couple, with the

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svakha behind. The groom and the bride advance to his parents and salute them. The company sing a song of glorification. The young couple bow to the groom's parents, three times to each, kiss them and receive their benediction; then the bridal pair are led to the table, at which they sit down. The *droushka* takes the plate with bread and salt from the father and goes out of the room with it to the bride's house, to invite her parents to the feast. 585

SCENE 4TH. The *svakha* leads the bride away into another chamber, where she is to change her dress and rearrange her hair. The *svakha* takes the veil off the bride, undoes her hair, combs it and makes it up again into two braids, which she winds around the head and covers with a kerchief; this is the way the married women dress their hair. [302]

SCENE 5TH. The bride is again covered with the veil and the *svakha* leads her out to the company, places her next to the groom and then solemnly pulls off her veil. This is the turning point in the ceremony, and from this moment the bride ceases to be a girl before the world and assumes the status of a married woman.

Somebody raps at the door.

SCENE 6TH. Enter the *droushka* with the bride's parents, who are welcomed with great honors and led to places near the head of the table.

Setting of the table. The *droushka* directs all the ceremonies of the feast. He first calls upon the *svakha*, who represents the groom's mother, to take out of the oven whatever she has and to set it upon the table. The *svakha* tries to remove the oven lid, but cannot do so and asks for help. The *droushka* then directs his friends to help her, and with songs, indicating the difficulty of the work, the young men of the groom's party pull off the lid and draw out the pots, which they place upon the table; the songs accompanying these actions are: "*Doobinoushka*" (No. 19)[1] and "Bold Mustaches"—*Oussy* (No. 14).[2]

The Feast. The whole company sit down to the table (except the *droushka* who sees that every guest has plenty of everything), cross themselves, asking a blessing and fall to. After they have eaten for a while, the best man offers a glass of 585 574

1 [See cat. 116, p. 40 – Analyst]

2 [See cat. 116, pp. 37–38 – Analyst]

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brandy on a plate to the groom's father, who tastes of it, but makes a wry face and says: "*gorko*" (bitter). The *droushka* puts a piece of sugar into the glass, the father tastes it again and repeats, "*gorko.*" Then the *droushka* asks the young couple to sweeten the drink; they thereupon rise, bow to the old man and kiss each other three times; the father then drains the cup with evident satisfaction, saying: "Ah, this is good." The same ceremony is repeated with the other relatives and guests, some of whom even insist on repeated sweetenings, to tease the young couple—especially if they see that the bride is bashful. The company, meantime, joke and sing appropriate songs. This scene is represented in the well known picture of Makovsky, called a Boyar's Wedding.

The presentation of gifts from the bride to the groom's relatives. The *droushka* first leads out the groom's father to a chair in the middle of the room, where he asks him to sit down; then the *droushka* approaches him with a glass of brandy on a plate, accompanied by the *svakha* with a present and by the young couple. They all bow to the father and ask him to accept the offerings. The *droushka* using a formula like this: "The young prince and the young princess do homage to you with a low bow and a bowl of festal mead. They beg you to accept the cup, to drain it and to cover the bottom—not with a dime or a dollar, but with a piece of gold; and if you have not that, half a dozen dollars will be acceptable to us and an honor to you." The presents consist of wearing apparel, gloves, kerchiefs, embroidered towels, etc. The father takes up the glass and tastes it, but refuses to drink, claiming it is too bitter; the young couple must sweeten it for him, just as before, which they finally do; when he drains the cup and accepts the present, they bow to him and kiss him. The mother of the groom is the next one to be led to the chair and given a present; she also asks for a sweetening of the drink, etc., and the same ceremony is gone through with all the groom's relatives.

In return for the teasing, each one puts a piece of money upon the plate. Songs enliven the proceeding, as for instance: "Glory to the Swan" (*Slava Lebediu*), etc.

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The feasting meantime goes on; the *drouzhka* treats everyone and asks the company to drink more. The songs at this time are: "I walk with the Wreath" (*So vyounom ya khojy*)[2] and "In the Meadows" (*Vo loosiakh*).[3]

The company gradually becomes more excited; they start to sing dance-songs; a young man and a girl come out into the middle of the room and start a jig dance, while the balance of the company sing the *Kamarinskaya* (No. 10) or the "Entrance Hall"—*Sseny* (No. 9).[4]

The bride's parents ask everyone to their house, to finish the night. The guests jump up and bid good-bye to the bridal pair and to the parents of the groom, and go away, singing and dancing.

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[2] [See cat. 116, p. 44 — Analyst]
[2] [See cat. 116, pp. 35–36 — Analyst]
[3] [See cat. 116, p. 35 — Analyst]
[4] [See cat. 116, pp. 34–35 — Analyst]